Influence of Disinformation on the Kenya Electoral Processes

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KEY FINDINGS

For the first time during the 2017 general elections, digital disinformation occurred on a massive scale in Kenya. This paper examines different forms of disinformation that were circulated online in the lead up to the 2017 elections. It also looks at its impact on the country's political discourse and the methods to counter disinformation in Kenya and elsewhere. Ultimately, combating this growing problem will require a variety of stakeholders to work toward a multi-pronged, collaborative response.

- Around 60 percent of Kenyan millennials obtain news through the Internet.

- The hasty spread of disinformation online enables an arsenal of misconceptions, then used by individuals or groups to target political contenders.

- Setting the record straight once disinformation begins circulating online is incredibly hard to do.

INTRODUCTION

On 21st March 2018, the online website Washington Post[1] published an article alleging that Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta hired the political consulting and data-mining firm Cambridge Analytica (CA) [2] to help him win the 2013 and 2017 general elections. This was supposedly done through exploiting the data of millions of Facebook users, profiling the electorates and coming up with campaign strategies that subverted the people's will. CA, a UK marketing analytics firm, was at the heart of the Facebook data scandal after it acquired the data of over 50 million Facebook users, without the users' expressed consent. They supposedly used it to create a system that could target voters with political ads and other personalized posts based on their profiles. Following revelations that CA used Facebook users' data to assist its clients in influencing the outcome of the 2016 presidential election in the United States, the matter went viral on social media. The firm is currently being investigated

for the role it may have played in the UK 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2016 US Elections, which is also linked to the Trump-Russia collusion[3].

Kenya's, United States' and United Kingdom's brush with the Cambridge Analytica scandal are examples of disinformation.

Disinformation is described as "*information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person[4], social group, organization, or country.*"

The cases offer a cautionary tale of how difficult it is to counter disinformation once it starts to spread.

This paper examines the different forms of disinformation that were circulated online in the lead up to and after Kenya's 2017 general elections, its influence on the country's political discourse. It considers the best ways to counter disinformation in Kenya.

DIGITAL LANDSCAPE IN KENYA

Around 60 percent of Kenya's millennials consume news through the Internet. This number is expected to rise in the coming years as the internet penetration rate is at 89.4% as per Kenya Internet Stats and Telecommunications Report[5] with over 46.8 million internet users as of 30th June 2019 with 200 percent growth in mobile devices penetration[6,7]. With more than 8.20 million active users on social media, which is mainly on Facebook (49.29%), Pinterest (19.61%), and on Twitter (17.26%), Kenya has a better internet connection compared to other countries in the African Sub-Sahara.[8]

One of the impacts of this shift to digital platforms is that disinformation can circulate easily, remaining unchecked and at unprecedented speeds, mainly through social media. Indeed, malicious political actors are now employing such technology to orchestrate more extensive disinformation campaigns and tarnish the reputations of their opponents in order to influence public opinion, predominantly during elections.

The challenge that Kenya faces is not unique. In countries like Nigeria, South Africa, and Sudan, where there are long-standing ethnic and religious tensions, citizens are coming online in significant numbers and increasingly accessing news on their mobile phones. In places where peace and stability are precarious, the spread of disinformation can have destructive impacts.

Figure 1 Social Media Stats in Kenya - November 2019 [9]

Disinformation around the 2017 Kenya General Elections

In the run-up to, during, and immediately following the 2017 general elections, different types of disinformation were aimed at Kenyan citizens. Portland & GeoPoll's[10] study on the *Reality of Fake News in Kenya[11]* revealed that 90% of respondents had seen or heard false news during the 2017 general election, with 87%

1   https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/03/20/how-cambridge-analytica-poisoned-kenyas-democracy/
2   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge_Analytica
3   https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/26/cambridge-analytca-trump-campaignus-electon-laws
4   https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c
5   https://www.internetworldstats.com/af/ke.htm
6   https://www.dw.com/en/mobile-solutions-a-catalyst-for-internet-penetration-in-kenya/a-47078206
7   https://www.gsmaintelligence.com/research/?file=8170bf058e42cdb8c186c6c75fb2b30e&download

reporting instances of deliberate false or fake news. It also found that while mainstream media remained the most trusted source of information, large numbers of people got their news from social media, primarily through Facebook and WhatsApp.

There was limited access to electoral information, especially from the Election Management Bodies (EMBs), which are the bodies mandated to manage elections, including voter information, political information, and security updates during the entire election period. Though the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC)[12] had some of its data available, none on voter education was provided. The body also experienced challenges in releasing and publishing information in a timely and systematic manner. Most of their digital platforms did not provide recent or adequate updates. The state also terminated a USAID funded civic electoral education program[13] which aimed at providing electoral technical assistance.

During the party primaries in 2017, candidates for each party, and several people were allegedly killed as rival groups accused each other of rigging. The primaries were riddled with controversies and violence, as most of the parties were ill-prepared, and no clear nomination guidelines were outlined. An example of this was the false publication that alleged Paul Otuoma had effected to the Jubilee party ahead of the Busia ODM party primaries[14].

> The Election Day itself went relatively smoothly, save for a few technical glitches surrounding the biometric systems, and the delayed opening of some polling stations.

A week to elections, it was reported that the IEBC's Systems Development Manager, Christopher Msando, had been tortured to death. The reports surrounding his death are still a mystery. Yet, a lot of skeptical and false information was shared to the extent that the victim's family cautioned social media users to be mindful of what they shared[15].

The Election Day itself went relatively smoothly, save for a few technical glitches surrounding the biometric systems, and the delayed opening of some polling stations. However, tensions began to mount when later that night, prior to the announcement of the official results; claims on the tampering with the voter transmission technology were made compromising the elections. A week after the IEBC announced the presidential results, intense protests and riots particularly, in the opposition strongholds, were witnessed. The opposition refuted the results claiming that the results transmission process was hacked. They also claimed that some IEBC personnel were given unauthorized access to the election systems and that they were part of a scheme to interfere with the polls. The opposition leader further accused Cambridge Analytica of spreading messages with the intent of tarnishing his name[16]. The opposition submitted a petition to the Supreme Court of Kenya, challenging the results declared by the IEBC. As a result, the Supreme Court of Kenya nullified the results citing irregularities and illegalities, leading to re-election on 26th October 2017.

8   https://digital4africa.com/data/#kenyasocialmediaoverview
9   https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/kenya
10   https://www.geopoll.com/blog/geopoll-and-portland-launch-a-survey-report-on-fake-news-in-kenya/
11   https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/325431/The-Reality-of-Fake-News-in-Kenya%20-%20FINAL.pdf
12   https://www.iebc.or.ke/
13   https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/no-plan-to-influence-kenyas-2017-elections-us-says/710844
14   https://standardmedia.co.ke/ktnhome/video/watch/2000126282/-false-publication-alleges-that-paul-otuoma-has-defected-to-jubilee-party
15   https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40807425
16   https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001328343/raila-attacks-political-communications-firm-cambridge- analytica
17   https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/kenya-latest-victim-fake-news-170816121455181.html
18   https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/kenya-latest-victim-fake-news-170816121455181.html

> Some social media users provided updates around the clock with others amplifying those reports, offering alternative or supplementary commentary.

Media reports were scanty and left many yearning for more information[17]. As things played out, many Kenyans who were not satisfied with the mainstream media's limited coverage of the situation were glued to various social media channels to get updates. Some social media users provided updates around the clock with others amplifying those reports, offering alternative or supplementary commentary. These updates were on the events taking place.

The majority of the reports coming from Nairobi slums, Kisumu, and other opposition stronghold areas painted a bleak picture. Confrontations between the police and protesters were reported resulting in multiple deaths and injuries upon the announcement of the election results.

However, this post-election violence was inadequately covered by mainstream media. More so, some pictures that were disseminated on some social media accounts allegedly portraying police brutality towards protesters were noted to be fake, as highlighted by the Kenya Red Cross Secretary General, Abbas Gullett, during an interview[18].

There was a rise in the number of websites and blogs that were designed to be an authentic source of information. However, they carried all sorts of disinformation and propaganda. Fake news articles and videos on conflicting opinion polls mimicking the Cable News Network (CNN), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and even the NTV Kenya logos[19] were also dispersed and shared widely on the social media platforms. By altering what was considered to be accurate, it was even harder to pinpoint what is indeed "fake news" and what wasn't.

In the period leading up to the fresh presidential election, there was a significant amount of happenings as the opposition leader Raila Odinga withdrew as he claimed that there was no prospect of a credible election. Even after this assertion, fake news campaigns continued to cast a shadow over the elections. One notable claim was a fake poll allegedly from the opinion polling firm, Ipsos Synovate, which was circulated to the media houses[20] claiming that the presidential candidates, Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga were neck to neck. The poll was published by various media houses but was retracted later after Ipsos Synovate issued a statement distancing themselves from the poll.

Disinformation and propaganda around elections are not new in Kenya, as these tools have previously been used to influence voters in past elections. However, during the 2017 election cycle, this migrated to popular social media platforms, to either play at existing beliefs, fears and biases, or to sway perceptions and even votes on the 8th August polls.

Social media was the go-to platform for many as a source of information for many. This was especially the case with the youth, who constituted more than half of the 19.6 million registered voters who also don't necessarily tune in to watch prime time news. Hence, it's not surprising that the Kenyan social media was filled with disinformation and fake news, aiming to alter these young voters' perceptions, views, and actions both before and after the general election.

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[19] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40762796
[20] https://pesacheck.org/a-fake-poll-website-shows-just-how-crafty-kenyan-fake-news-is-getting-35cf90aeb64

DISSEMINATION TECHNIQUES USED IN THE 2017 KENYA

General Elections

Most of the content was being disseminated unwittingly by people on social media, retweeting without checking. Journalists who were under pressure amplified reports emerging from the social web in real-time. Some of the content was being pushed by loosely connected groups who deliberately attempted to influence public opinion by overriding on trending topics and popular hashtags, and some were being disseminated as part of sophisticated disinformation campaigns, through bot networks and troll factories.

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Previous attempts to influence public opinion relied on 'one-to-many' broadcasting station but, with the new platforms like social media, they allow the propagation of targeted information to users. Once the user inadvertently shared a misleading or fabricated article, image, video, or meme, the next person who sees it in their social feed probably trusts the original poster and goes on to share it themselves. Trusted peer-to-peer networks power the high spread and speed. Few users who shared inaccurate or misleading posts quickly took them down, corrected their mistakes, or even apologized. Undesirable political content/messages were shared via bulk SMS and various premium rate platform. During the election period, there was a rise in the use of bulk messaging premium services, most of which were unsubstantiated content shared and was misleading or confusing. The majority of unsolicited messages were sent to customers/consumers who had not subscribed to the service. There was also the alleged (*unauthorized*) sharing or sale of existing customer databases for purposes of sending out political messages, poll tracking, and lobbying activities.

There has also been a great deal of focus on governments' responses. Though Kenya didn't experience internet shut-downs as was the norm in most African countries during the electioneering period, the government cut-off three high profile media stations during and after Raila Odinga's unofficial "inauguration" citing security reasons. However, the reasons were debatable, as it was perceived as a threat and assault on freedom of expression and media. The move raised more questions on the independent and balanced coverage of events. Though the High Court suspended the media shutdown, the government didn't comply with the ruling.

In the absence of the three leading media houses, citizens were forced to source for information elsewhere, including newspapers and social media. Others went to the state-owned and affiliated media stations for news, which are perceived to attract low viewership due to their pro-government bias.

Assessing the Impact of Disinformation on the 2017 Elections

Political rumors and misinformation were part and parcel of Kenyan politics prior to the advent of social media. The emergence of social media platforms simply represents a further stage of transformation in political communications that have gone from newspapers to radio, television, block text messages and internet-based forms of communication over the last couple of years.

It would be far-fetched to claim that only online disinformation influenced the outcome of the 2017 elections in Kenya. More than 10.6 percent[21] of the population still does not have access to the Internet and with less than 20% active users on social media users

in Kenya as per *Social Media Stats in Kenya - November 2019*. Still, the impact of this disinformation does not remain restricted to cyberspace. Instead, it trickles into other media, like print, television, and radio. The stiff competition by news outlets to be first in breaking

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stories has, unfortunately, led to cases where disinformation gets picked up without adequate verification[22]. While most reporters are increasingly looking to social media to cover the day's news, online disinformation is expected to continue to find its way into traditional news coverage.

The hasty spread of disinformation online enables an arsenal of misconceptions, then used by individuals or groups to target a political contender. The extent of the lie isn't always as crucial as circulating false information about seemingly inconsequential details. For example, like the number of cars in a political motorcade, the number of security detail in the campaign trail can be used to capture attention and portray a candidate in a less way.

Research suggests information consumers are highly biased and inclined to believe things that already fit their domain view. If they support an ideology, party, or leader, they will look for information that confirms their bias and ignore what reverses their views. The ones that are seen to be credible are those that resonate with individuals because they contain an element of truth, or play on recent experiences. If they dislike something or someone and come across a post that would support their views against that person, they will not only trust that piece of information but also share it without verification.

As a result, disinformation campaigns can increase the polarization in the political landscape - *"if you cannot convince them, confuse them." - Zarrar Khuhro.* It's a tool at the hands to confuse the public about the truth by swamping social media with fabricated stories. Amidst all of the false stories circulating online, it can be hard to sort fact from fiction. Disinformation might not only have directly impacted the election outcome, but it did encourage animosity among political foes online and intensify polarity. Further, given that digital literacy remains quite low in Kenya, audiences are vulnerable to accepting false information as fact.

Efforts to Counter Disinformation in Kenya

It takes far more time to counter false news than to spread it. Unlike in many developed countries, where extensive resources are being dedicated to debunking misinformation, efforts to counter disinformation are nascent in Kenya. Some Kenyan legislators are calling for increased legislation. Already on the books is the Kenya Information and Communications Act[23] , which criminalizes the "improper use" of a telecommunication system and also criminalizes unlawful the sending of misleading messages, Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018[24], which criminalizes the spreading of false information. Those found guilty can be fined to the tune of $50,000, two years of jail time, or both, to be imposed on any person who intentionally publishes false information. However, experts' view that the Act may be used by the government to target journalists it disagrees with and the Kenya Access to Information Act, 2016[25] , which provides the right to access information.

There is also a Consumer Protection

21 https://www.internetworldstats.com/af/ke.htm
22 https://www.samaa.tv/news/2018/06/you-all-fell-for-the-wrong-shabnam/
23 http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/bills/2019/TheKenyaInformationandCommunication__Amendment_Bill_2019_NA_Bills_No._61.pdf
24 http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/ComputerMisuseandCybercrimesActNo5of2018.pdf

Regulations Guideline 2017[26] on the prevention of dissemination of undesirable bulk and premium rate political messages and political, social media content via electronic communication networks. Most recently, the Data Protection Bill, 2019[27] was signed into law. The Act provides the legal framework for the protection of a person's data and information, aping those provided by General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[28] which imposes strict new rules on controlling and processing personally identifiable information (PII) formed after the Cambridge Analytica's[29] saga

Facebook also spearheaded an online media literacy campaign[30], encouraging audiences to consider specific elements of any news story before accepting it as a fact. Those tips were published in both English and Swahili as full-page ads in local newspapers during the Kenya 2017 General elections. Major publications also occasionally published articles debunking disinformation and misinformation online.

During Kenya's repeat presidential election in 2017, Migori Senate By-Election 2018 and Kibra Member of National Assembly By-Election
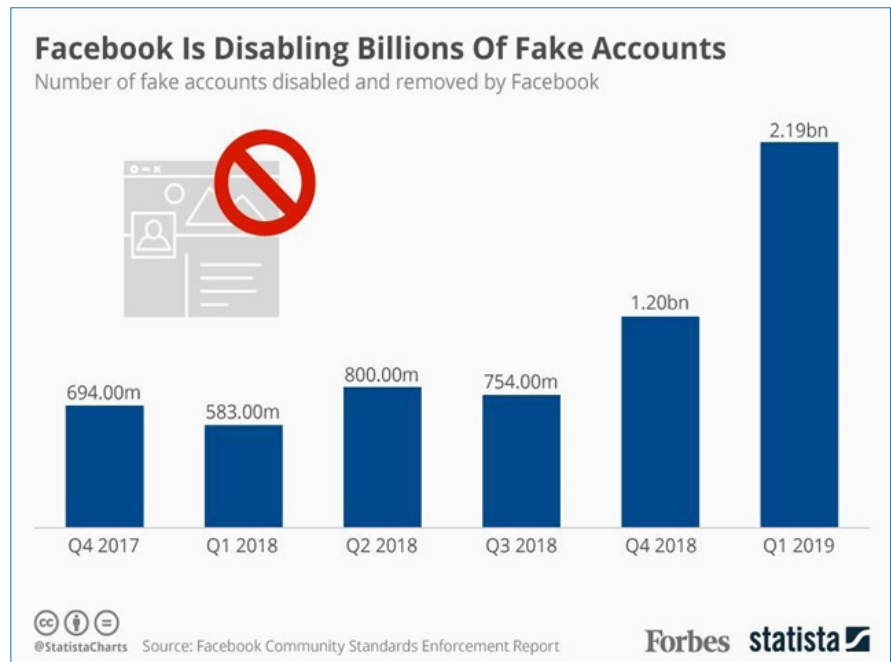

Figure 2 Number of fake accounts disabled and removed by Facebook – Q1 2019 @STATISTA

2019, ELOG partnered with Code for Africa and *PesaCheck* to identify and contextualize likely instances of disinformation. Using Check, developed by Meedan, the team was able to check claims made on social media, online sites as well as on mainstream media during and immediately after the Election Day.

In March 2018, the United States Embassy in Kenya launched[31] a one-year media literacy campaign under #StopReflectVerify and #YALIChecks[32] , which aimed at countering the spread of false information in Kenya. The Embassy used its mixed online platforms to raise awareness of the campaign to engage in an assortment of online activities, including an email series, an online quiz, blog posts, online chats, public outreach, educational videos, and an online pledge.

How social media companies are curbing disinformation

Facebook (*a social networking company that has acquired 79 other companies, including WhatsApp, Instagram*), Community Standards Enforcement Report,[33] indicated

25 http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/AccesstoInformationActNo31of2016.pdf

26 https://ca.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Guidelines-on-Prevention-of-Dissemination-of-Undesirable-Bulk-and-Premium-Rate-Political-Messages-and-Political-Social-Media-Content-Via-Electronic-Networks-1.pdf

27 http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/2019/TheDataProtectionAct__No24of2019.pdf

28 https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2018/02/14/what-is-general-data-protection-regulation/#71deb1eb62dd

29 https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/21/facebook-cambridge-analytica-scandal-everything-you-need-to-know.html

29 https://qz.com/africa/1044573/facebook-and-whatsapp-introduce-fake-news-tool-ahead-of-kenya-elections/

31 https://ke.usembassy.gov/ambassador-godec-u-s-embassy-counter-fake-news-media-literacy-campaign/

32 https://www.stopreflectverify.com/

that it detected and removed 5.4 billion fake accounts. This is near twice the number of fake accounts detected and removed in Quarter 1 2019 (*Q1 2019*) and is attributed to an increasing number of attacks by bad actors who attempt to create large volumes of accounts at once. In 2018, 3.3 billion fake accounts were removed, which reveals the challenge Facebook is facing in curbing fake news[34].

Other measures Facebook has deployed include removing fake accounts and reducing the reach of articles that have been debunked by independent third-party fact-checkers[35]. Similarly, in Kenya, Facebook is working with Africa Check – Kenya[36], AFP Kenya[37], and PesaCheck[38] to help identify and review false news. Twitter also banned political ads (*political advertising*)[39], the popular social media site will not allow ads that advocate for political causes. The move comes amid growing pressure on social media companies to stop accepting ads that spread false information and could sway elections. Twitter has also begun removing suspicious accounts from users' followers as it battles fake accounts[40].

Facebook has also increased transparency on who is buying political ads as it requires more information about the buyer under its new political ads policy[41]. This is after Google announced restrictions on political advertising[24] as well as Twitter, which rolled out revised political advertising policies[43]. Political advertising on social media and internet platforms has become particularly fraught election cycles because of how campaigns increasingly rely on digital channels to spread their messages and reach voters.[44] By so doing, the companies will curtail the spread of disinformation across its site. Most ads, which target specific groups, can stir up disinformation because advertisers can exacerbate niche audiences susceptible to tailored messages.

WhatsApp (*the most popular messaging app due to its low cost*) messenger has admitted to struggling with finding ways to detect and manage the flow and impact of misinformation. Its sheer popularity further amplifies WhatsApp's potential as a tool for misinformation: it's the most popular messaging app across several African countries.[45]

In Kenya, Safaricom - a local telecom company has also created WhatsApp-free data bundles (*Internet*) packages for users due to user demand. In contrast, other telecom companies have reduced their internet charges drastically. Despite the modernity of WhatsApp and the technology that powers it, it is the "biggest sharers" of misinformation linked to social trust. This is due to the tendency of sharing, which is attributed to a lack of digital literacy and reliance on trusted social networks.

Earlier in 2019, WhatsApp announced that it was going to limit the forwarding of messages on its platform to 5 (five) chats to curb the forward of spam and fake messages. This was also done to ensure that its platform was used for private messages among friends and family. Before that, a user could forward a chat to at least 256 people. WhatsApp began labeling forwarded messages[46] to

[33] https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement
[34] https://citizentv.co.ke/business/over-5-4billion-fake-facebook-accounts-shut-down-293553/
[35] https://www.facebook.com/help/publisher/182222309230722
[36] africacheck.org
[37] afp.com
[38] pesacheck.org
[39] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-twitter-politics-adban/twitter-tightens-bans-on-political-ads-and-causes-ahead-of-2020-us-election-idUSKBN1XP224
[40] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/11/technology/twitter-fake-followers.html
[41] https://www.facebook.com/policies/ads/restricted_content/political
[42] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/30/technology/twitter-political-ads-ban.html
[43] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/technology/google-political-ads-targeting.html
[44] https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/22/technology/campaigns-pressure-facebook-political-ads.html

> Despite the modernity of WhatsApp and the technology that powers it, it is the "biggest sharers" of misinformation linked to social trust.

curb the app's viral misinformation problems. In Kenya, it was a prevalent issue ahead of the country's elections during the 2017 General Elections[47], as skewed voting information, conspiracy theories, and false stories about the candidates spread across the network.

Nigeria's WhatsApp research – *WhatsApp and Nigeria's 2019 Elections*[48] showed that the messenger had become a fabric of election campaigns and was a key mechanism through which political leaders sought to communicate with their campaign teams and supporters. The platform was increasingly relied upon to coordinate campaign events and to sell the candidate's credentials and manifesto as well as to criticize rivals. However, the danger emanating from using the WhatsApp platform at the time was that disinformation would be shared rapidly, while inadequate measures to counter false stories immediately were not securely in place. Currently, the platform has proven to be challenging to monitor due to its closed and private nature (*encrypted character of its design*), which means the contents of group discussions are inaccessible to all except group members.

Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter have made great strides in fighting fake news, but much is still to be done. For example, tech companies signed on to the EU's "*code of practice on disinformation*"[49] - a voluntary agreement that laid out steps to fight fake news on their platforms. [50]This meant that the tech companies would soon face stricter regulations in the EU related to disinformation and illegal content online.

EMERGING DISINFORMATION

Techniques (*The Future*)
Bots and Trolls

In recent years, the use of bots and trolls to shape online discussions became common across countries considered as an exploiting bug in the digital space going beyond conflict or authoritarian settings. Such is the replica of today's authoritarian regimes. Whereas pro-government accounts swarm political hashtags to crackdown activists and marginalize protesters, criminal hackers use phishing attacks to steal passwords.

Online trolling, harassment, and distraction—primarily through active automated accounts—are a vital component of the latest disinformation purveyor's valuable tools.[51] To avoid detection, the accounts are partially automated and partially controlled by human users. Though many bots are purely for commercial use, designed to sell products or attract clicks, some are political, used to amplify false or biased stories in order to sway public view.

Computational propaganda

This is the use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to distribute misleading information over social media networks purposefully[52]. Social media platforms play a significant role as they are used as crucial channels for political engagement and disseminating news content. Young people develop their

45 https://qz.com/africa/1688521/whatsapp-increases-the-spread-of-fake-news-among-older-nigerians/
46 https://www.theverge.com/2018/7/10/17554674/whatsapp-label-forwarded-messages
47 https://qz.com/africa/1411947/facebook-starts-africa-fact-checking-tool-with-afp-africa-check/
48 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334736880
49 https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/29/eu-tells-facebook-google-and-twitter-to-take-more-action-on-fake-news.html
50 https://www.ned.org/issue-brief-how-

> It is important to mention that these sites do not reach out to those who are not predisposed to fact-checking owing to their cognitive biases or due to digital illiteracy.

political identities mainly through these platforms. They are actively used as tools for public opinion manipulation, amplifying or repressing political content on various topics, disinformation, hate speech, and junk news.[53]

Deep fakes
Highly realistic fake videos might take online disinformation to the next level and deep fakes are becoming the next propaganda tool[54]. This is the newest tool that can alter people's reality or perception regarding shared information. The technology uses artificial intelligence to alter images, videos and other representations digitally. This is in order to generate fabricated images and sounds that appear to be real. They depict people in fake videos that they did not actually appear in, and can potentially affect national security, and democracy.

Responses to Disinformation Counter disinformation mechanisms
Websites and portals have been set up – by independent groups or states – as mechanisms to debunk fake news that constitutes disinformation and other falsehoods. They promote accuracy in public debate and the media. In Kenya, projects such as *PesaCheck.org* and *AfricaCheck. org* use crowdsourced journalism to help sort facts from fiction. Their content gives the public an in-depth insight and context regarding posts they view on their social media feeds. The sites check facts, verify information, and refute inaccurate reports and propaganda about events in Kenya and Africa at large.

It is important to mention that these sites do not reach out to those who are not predisposed to fact-checking owing to their cognitive biases or due to digital illiteracy. Moreover, this form of debunking is slow as it requires one to uncover whether a news item is false by firstly, and not sharing the item further; and secondly, fact-checking at one of these sites. It also assumes that the reader will trust the findings of the fact-checkers, whereas the fact-checkers themselves are often accused of being biased. Given the challenges, such websites should be run in tandem with broader strategic communications efforts.[55]

Strategic Communications
This helps in providing an overview of the communicative responses taken, actions, target groups, and tools. Raising awareness of the issue among both news consumers and local journalists is key to countering disinformation. Each agency/stakeholder should develop a response needs for effective communication and forecasting, addressing and responding strategies to disinformation activities, including content creation over different timeframes as well as strengthening the overall media environment.

Most people globally still primarily rely on television and radio for news. As well, of the people who go to social media for their news, increasing evidence shows that many do not trust it, with trust in traditional media still being higher. Discussions need to take place about how good-quality journalism needs to be based on conventional approaches to basing reporting

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51 https://www.ned.org/issue-brief-how-disinformation-impacts-politics-and-publics/
52 http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Casestudies-ExecutiveSummary.pdf
53 http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Casestudies-ExecutiveSummary.pdf
54 https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/79877
55 Fake News: National Security in the Post-Truth Era Www.Rsis.Edu.Sg › PR180313_Fake-News_WEB
56 https://www.csis.org/coming-together-fight-fake-news-lessons-european-approach-disinformation

> The Internet remains the best tool to ensure that information is shared and available to everyone 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week/ 365 days a year.

on facts. It must also address the vast amounts of data that are now available and that need to be sifted through and analyzed. Furthermore, newsrooms should consider establishing dedicated fact-checking teams to counter disinformation.

The strategies must also take into consideration the advantage of technological developments. The Internet remains the best tool to ensure that information is shared and available to everyone 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week/ 365 days a year.

Self-regulation by tech companies

The tech companies have a role to play in this regard. Tech companies are the ones running the online platforms where disinformation campaigns launch and spread. Algorithm-based, advertising-driven social media dynamics have served as a key facilitator of amplified dissemination of false messages.[56]

Since disinformation is a problem with diverse and complicated roots, the challenge of countering it does not land in any particular portfolio. To address the issue,

there is a need for collaboration and consultation with different agencies (*both stakeholders and private sectors*) in the industry. This is in order to have co-regulatory initiatives for reducing false information spread online and an action plan by the monitoring body to oversee the implementation of the code's commitments.

They should also elevate data privacy into the realm of individual rights and created some guarantees for the processing of personal data, particularly during electoral activities. Tech companies should invest more in tools that identify fake news.

Reducing Financial Incentives in Advertisements

The move by social media companies to review political advertisement purchases is among the methods put in place to reduce the threat of disinformation through fake news. The process of targeting advertisement purchases essentially aims to reduce the volume of fake news by removing the financial incentive for its creation. However, it requires private and public sectors to

collaborate in exploring ways to alter how advertising revenue is generated online. Industry standards and codes of ethics should be established in order to institute more social accountability in online advertising.

Government Legislation

The government is implementing or mooting for new laws and policies as a critical measure to counter fake news. Laws can hold technological companies and social media users accountable for the distribution and spreading of inaccurate information, and online advertisements that allow fake news to spread. For example, the Consumer Protection Regulations Guideline 2017[57], Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018[58] and Data Protection Act, 2019[59], which helps to counter the evolution of crime through technology. The Access to Information Act, 2016[60] also helps to access information more easily and compels government agencies to make official information available. Access to information is a universal and human right, which plays an essential role in the social and political processes of our societies. However, as the state seeks to criminalise the distribution and spread of fake news or hold content

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57 https://ca.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Guidelines-on-Prevention-of-Dissemination-of-Undesirable-Bulk-and-Premium-Rate-Political-Messages-and-Political-Social-Media-Content-Via-Electronic-Networks-1.pdf

58 http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/ComputerMisuseandCybercrimesActNo5of2018.pdf

59 http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/2019/TheDataProtectionAct__No24of2019.pdf

60 http://kenyalaw.org/kl/fileadmin/pdfdownloads/Acts/AccesstoInformationActNo31of2016.pdf

61 https://www.csis.org/coming-together-fight-fake-news-lessons-european-approach-disinformation

providers responsible, it will be bound to face certain challenges as it may be more political than technical constraints. The minefield of legal issues stemming from definitional problems may arise. Laws against fake news is thus an emerging research area that requires further studies to assess the impact and possible amendments needed to ensure its efficacy in the long term.

> On the issue of evidence, the aspirant/ candidate has a big role to play to ensure that they collect evidence that will be admissible in an electoral court and hence increase the chances of success of the matter.

Given the challenges, legislation should be complemented with non-legislative measures and the government should work with all stakeholders involved, including the social media owners (managers), media, CSO, and tech companies among others.

Governments should avoid crackdowns on the news media's ability to cover the news. Those activities limit freedom of expression and hamper the ability of journalists to cover political developments.

Governments should avoid censoring content and making online platforms liable for misinformation. [61]This could curb free expression, making people hesitant to share their political opinions for fear it could be censored as fake news.

Critical Thinking and Media Literacy

Perhaps most importantly is to understand that we cannot fight disinformation by cutting off the "heads of the hydra" one at a time. A more sustainable way must involve a sustained effort to promote positive counter-messages that can compete with false and divisive content[62]. These measures should focus on solutions from the demand-side rather than the supply-side, building resilience to disinformation campaigns from the bottom up.

The other measure is to intensify proactive and objective communications to provide positive counter-narratives to disinformation campaigns. More so, the state and civil society actors are a crucial part of a successful strategy to counter disinformation and should incorporate such tactics into its strategy.[63] This also should entail teaching citizens to be more cautious in consuming information, including having the natural inclination to fact-check the materials they read which will encourage a culture shift

Improving media literacy—strengthening critical attitudes among citizens towards different sources of news—is another vital tool for an effective anti-dis- information strategy. Media literacy programs are particularly effective when they are not limited to young people but target all citizens in different sectors of society, including media professionals. [64]

More studies should be conducted in the country contexts, to provide a more nuanced understanding of how vulnerability and resistance to disinformation vary across political contexts.[16] These can be complemented by studies on the connections between online harassment, violence and political engagement, particularly on women, youth and marginalized groups.

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[62] https://www.csis.org/coming-together-fight-fake-news-lessons-european-approach-disinformation
[63] https://www.csis.org/coming-together-fight-fake-news-lessons-european-approach-disinformation
[64] https://www.csis.org/coming-together-fight-fake-news-lessons-european-approach-disinformation
[65] https://www.demworks.org/infotegrity-and-ndi-s-efforts-combat-disinformation
[66] https://firstdraftnews.org/latest/fake-news-complicated/

GLOSSARY: WHAT IS DISINFORMATION?

While commonly used, the term "fake news" is not the most helpful when trying to identify the particular challenge to be addressed. The term covers a range of very different types of false or misleading information. Below is a taxonomy by First Draft[66] of seven different types of such information and online content that could be considered as "fake news":

- **Satire or parody**: There is no intention to cause harm, but there is the potential to fool.
- **False connection**: When headlines, visuals, or captions don't support the content.
- **Misleading content**: The misleading use of information to frame an issue or individual.
- **False context**: When genuine content is shared with false contextual information.
- **Imposter content**: When genuine sources are impersonated.
- **Manipulated content**: When accurate information or imagery is manipulated to deceive.
- **Fabricated content**: When content is 100% false and designed to deceive and do harm.

Using this taxonomy, something which is called "fake news" might not be fake at all—nor would it necessarily even be what you'd ordinarily call "news"—meaning the term is inaccurate in and of itself. Further, the problem is that the term "fake news" has been appropriated by many politicians and their supporters to denigrate coverage or reporting, which they simply dislike. For these and other reasons, there is a growing acknowledgment that other terms should be used in its place. Two of the most commonly put forward are "disinformation" and "misinformation." While neither has a universally accepted and used definition, example definitions include:

Disinformation: False, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented, and promoted to cause public harm or for profit intentionally.

Misinformation: The inadvertent or unintentional spread of false or inaccurate information without malicious intent.

These terms have many advantages over "fake news," in that they more clearly set out the scope of the particular type of information, the harm caused, and the relevant intent (or lack thereof).

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